

THE GREAT BUFFALO AND WILD WEST SHOW
By Claude Elder C.H.S.

In 1902 some Missoula men got the notion of a wild west show featuring a herd of buffalo from the Flathead Indian Reservation. Chief owners were the brothers Wm. A. and Frank Simons. About a dozen buffalo were furnished by Chas. Allard, who travelled with the show. His father was one of the few who had preserved a small number when buffalo were driven from wild state on the western plains.

Geo. L. Hutchin was hired as Manager - - - he was afterwards head of the Northwest Exposition held in Portland, Ore., in 1905. Side show and all privileges were in charge of W.J. McDonald who the previous season owned a 10-car circus which had closed on the west coast due to financial troubles. His ticket wagon and other equipment were used. Quarters were established on the fairgrounds at Missoula, then located where the present sugar factory stands. Seats were made by the Big Blackfoot Milling Co., at Bonner, six miles east, both blues and the star backs.

A band was hired in the east --- pay \$8.00 per week. Fred Dodge, a Missoula boy, was bass drummer, but quit the show at Miles City. Casey, baseball player and printer, was announcer (before public address or even megaphones were generally used). The boss hostler was Ed Vosberg, driver for a Missoula M.D. One of the barn men from Missoula was Windy Jack Wilson, still living here. Treasurer was Chauncey Woodworth, former ticket seller at Bennett and Union theatres.

Performers arrived, rehearsals were held, and the show opened in Missoula July 2nd. A feature of the side-show was a Circassian lady - - who was immediately recognized as a Florence Hotel waitress with a wig. Stage coach used for hold-up scene was one that had seen long service between Ravalli and Polson. Standard wild west acts were used such as qudrille on horseback by men and girls of the troupe, hanging an outlaw, roping and riding. There was much delay the opening night getting acts on and off. When it came time to load the show it was found it would not fit on the number of cars hired, and the N.P. agent Mr. N.H. Mason, was routed out of bed to provide two more flats, making some 14 cars altogether.

The show had to pass up its Helena date and proceeded to Butte where it showed two days. They played Baraboo, Wis., and a Mrs. Ringling visited. Rain did much damage to attendance all the way, and the show after being out a couple months closed at Marshal town, Iowa. Trouble was also had with the buffalo, loading and unloading, several died enroute.

Perhaps the start of the idea of this show was the success of several performances at Missoula and Butte, Allard taking a herd there on various occasions, to show fairgrounds and race tracks. The cost of these was not great and the attendance was always large. All the original owners, performers, etc., are believed to be dead, there only being above mentioned men, Dodge and Wilson, still living in Missoula.

In later years, Dan Wioker, a Missoula gambler, and another variety showman named McDonald, got the circus bee. This was about 1908. A large tent was bought, a 16-piece band hired, bandwagon built, some animals arrived, but the show never took to the road. The tent was used for vaudeville and motion pictures for a time, it was said all the money available was used before railroad contract could be made.

Doc. Waddell was here that year ahead of the Floto show. The advertising car was at Missoula ten days due to the big washout. The show was re-routed to the south. Doc tells many interesting stories of how he amused himself, the town people, and other show and commercial travelers marooned here.

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